

## STUDY GUIDE

### Harold Green Jewish Theatre Company presents A Rustwerk Refinery Production of “...And Stockings for the Ladies”

#### Introduction

The following is a document intended for teachers to prepare students to see "*...and stockings for the ladies*" as well as those interested in using the accompanying historical letters and photos as part of their lesson plan. Our goal is to provide teachers information and resources to lead students into the world of the play. We hope you will find useful points of discussion and exercises that will enrich the theatre experience both before and after the show. The package is designed for those looking to briefly introduce the play as well as those interested in a dynamic and interesting approach to teaching a part of 20 century history. Please feel free to pick and choose what fits your needs and if you have any questions do not hesitate to contact us.

As part of the document you will find

1. A history of the company and the play
2. A summary of the true story the play is based on.
3. A series of pre-show and post-show discussion topics
4. A series of exercises that use the letters from Ted Aplin included in the package
5. A series of exercises that incorporate the photos included in the package.
6. A selection of Ted Aplin's letters.
7. A few photos from the time.
8. Contact information

## **The Rustwerk Refinery**

We are a young independent theatre company whose mandate is to create plays based on historical events always attempting to match the ideal style with the story being told. "*...and stockings for the ladies*" is an award winning production from 2007 and has performed in Toronto Montreal and the East Coast of Canada. The artists involved have trained in Canada and Europe and have a specialized training in physical theatre.

## **History of the play**

At the heart of "*...and stockings for the ladies*" are a series of letters written by Ted Aplin to his wife Elinor in Canada. The letters are an eloquent and striking description of the aftermath of WWII from a man who sought to do everything he could for people in need. Ted's letters are a remarkable piece of history with a valuable sense of perspective on the tragedy that befell Germany and Europe. The letters spanned just over a year while he was away and describe in great detail his work with refugees in Bergen-Belsen as well as his feelings for his wife and family at home. They are intimate, funny, descriptive, and ultimately a beautiful primary resource for the play. Ted Aplin is in fact the step-grandfather of playwright, Attila Clemann so he was able to access family stories about the man to add depth to the character. Furthermore, Attila did extensive research into the events surrounding the time of the letters including interviewing Ted's very good friend and assistant at the time Stanly Winfield. Stanley played an important role in corroborating the facts as well as being the inspiration for the main narrator of the story, *Daniel*. While most of the events portrayed in the play are true, and all the letters recited by *Ted* are direct quotes, some characters and events were necessarily changed for dramatic efficiency and overall arc. The goal was to create a dynamic and timely piece that would evoke in the audience an understanding for the historical characters and events involved.

## **The True Story**

Ted Aplin and Stanley Winfield met while serving with the 84 Disarmament Group of the Royal Canadian Air Force. The Group was formed as part of the Allied Control Commission in occupied Germany where the two men were stationed in the town of Celle not far from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. With the German Luftwaffe completely disarmed the men of the 84th Group had little else to do. With time on his hands Ted Aplin defied RCAF directives and visited the Bergen-Belsen camp administered by the British Army, the Red Cross, and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

Deeply struck by his encounter with the survivors in the camp, Ted Aplin began to assist them any way he could. His sense of compassion, ability to motivate people, and his position as an officer in the RCAF gave him the means to offer some of the former camp inmates a renewed sense of humanity. It was due to Ted's work with a devised postal system that he managed to reunite numerous survivors with loved ones in Canada and England. He arranged a transport of orphans to England, organized picnics

for the children, and delivered clothing and school supplies to the camp, all aiding in the psychological rehabilitation of the survivors.

Ted Aplin became fascinated by his work at Bergen-Belsen which was outside the jurisdiction of the RCAF and he quickly incurred reprimands and attacks from commanding officers. He risked court martial as he faced pressure from “the braid” to stop his work with the DPs.

Over the course of Ted’s posting, Stanley Winfield was assigned as Ted’s clerk. He soon discovered that the man he was working for was not just following orders but was seeking out ways to really help those most in need. Stanley was responsible for archiving a number of Ted’s letters and recording his efforts and it is largely because of Stanley Winfield that we understand what Ted Aplin did. Their long standing friendship began in an intensely difficult moment in history and while it was an acquaintance first bound by military hierarchy, at home it soon became something more.

## Pre-Show

### Discussion Topic before seeing "...and stockings for the ladies."

#### The Holocaust

When did these events occur?

Where is Bergen-Belsen and what happened there?

Who was affected?

What was Canada's role in WWII?

What happened in Germany after Germany surrendered?

What happened to the many refugees left in the wake of the Nazis?

#### Vocabulary from the era that might be interesting to discuss.

*The "digger"* Soldiers referred to the "digger" when they talked about getting into trouble with their superior officers

*"Civvy street"* Soldiers returning home after several years being in uniform were said to be coming home to *civvy street* or in other words they were civilians and no longer in uniform.

*VE day* Victory in Europe day, May 8, 1945

*collaborator* At the time a collaborator was considered anyone who agreed with or worked with the Nazis

*DP* DP stood for Displaced Persons and was the term used for the hundreds of thousands of survivors of Nazi Germany who had no home to return to and were forced to continue living in the concentration camps after liberation until they could find a new place to live. For many people at the time "DP" was considered a rather derogatory term.

*D-Day* This is a military term used to describe the day of a major attack. The "D" in D-Day actually refers to "Day" so one might say it is the Day of Days. The most famous D-Day was June 6 1944 when Allied troops invaded Normandy.

## Post Show

### **Discussion Topics for after seeing "*...and stockings for the ladies.*"**

What was your general impression of the show? Likes, dislikes, favorite moments.

What was your impression of the puppets?

How many characters do you think the actor played?

Was it easy to understand even though there was only one actor for so many parts?

Did everyone like what he was doing?

Why did Ted Aplin get into trouble?

Do you think what Ted Aplin did was the right thing to do? Was it easy to do?

What are some of the things we could learn from in the events of the piece.

Where do you think the title comes from?

Why do you suppose the author wanted to write the play?

### **Exercises:**

#### **Personal Histories**

Every family has a story that interesting, strange, or funny and would be great as the subject for a film. Ask your parents for one such interesting story and write a synopsis of a movie based on your own family history.

#### **Puppets**

The puppets in the play were used to create a dramatic effect. Perhaps you can create a puppet and try to tell a family story through the puppet. Remember to use a different voice than your own and try to move the puppet like a real person.

#### **Letter to the past**

Write a letter to one of the characters in the play about what you thought of them.

#### **True or not true**

Not everything in the play actually happened. Some things represented are collected from different stories. Perhaps a discussion will illicit questions about which parts were true and which were not and letters could be written to the company to verify the answers.

## The Letters.

Enclosed in the Educational Package are a series of some of the letters Ted Aplin wrote to his wife. They span a year from December 1944 to December 1945 and provide a wonderful perspective on the time. He wrote often about personal things but also his feelings about politics, the war, and his experiences with refugees from Bergen-Belsen.

These letters are a primary resource for a historian trying to get a sense of what life was like at that time and students will find it a fascinating excerpt of the past. How to use the letters.

They can be used in conjunction with the exercises suggested below or simply as a departure point for discussion and further research into the events surrounding WWII. There are quite a few letters so if there is too much material for each student, consider distributing the letters so that collectively the students can find out who Ted was and talk about the world he lived in.

### *Not enough time for all the letters?*

If there is only time for one or two letters consider the letter titled "Dear Lil" dated June 17, 1945 and the "Picnic" letter dated July 17, 1945. They are very interesting because they are exactly one month apart but show a remarkable contrast in spirit.

### **Questions**

What did letters mean to people in the 1940s? Were letters important or not important? Why?

Who are some of the people Ted talked about?

Could you make a family tree just based on what you read in the letters?

Ted refers to VE day and D-Day. What are these days?

What did Ted feel about the war and how can you tell by the letters?

What did Ted feel about his family and how can you tell by the letters?

Who did Ted say he was having disagreements with?

Who did Ted work for and what were some of his duties?

Who are the RCAF?

Who are the RAF?

Who are the Red Cross?

What is the Third Reich?

### **Exercises**

(These more extensive exercises could be done in groups or individually.)

### **Who was this person?**

Historians don't just look at dates of when major events happened, they have to look at individuals and the specifics of their lives; even people who are not in the middle of those major events. It is individuals who make history interesting, the dates just help keep things in order.

Using the package of letters make a detailed description of the kind of person Ted Aplin was. Can you deduce his personality traits from what he talks about; his concerns, his political ideas, his likes and dislikes. Describe Ted's personality and use direct evidence from the letters to prove your opinion.

### **Cross referencing.**

When we hear a story from someone, that is one person's perspective; their own opinion. When we hear the same or similar stories from several people we can get a broader more comprehensive view of an event. Like any detective, we need to double check our facts to have a clear picture.

Ted's letters refer to many true events and people that have been very well recorded. Pick three and find other historical references that corroborate his story.

### **Tracing footsteps**

The letters span a year in Ted's life and he moves across several countries and mentions a number of cities. On a map of Europe plot out Ted's trip to give a visual representation of his journey. Include the dates of when he was there and what he did in each place as well as the borders at that time.

### **"Based on a True Story"**

Many movies, books, television shows and plays are based on real events and real people. This requires someone taking true historical events and then presenting them to an audience.

After reading the letters write a synopsis of a movie or television show based on the events Ted wrote about. It could be in any style, with Ted or anyone else as the main character. Just imagine that the first thing the audience sees is "This movie is based on a true story."

## The Photos

Photos are of course a very valuable resource for historians but as creators we also used many images we found to help imagine the people on stage. Enclosed are a series of photos which relate directly to the letters. They are from the picnics that Ted Aplin talks about. Matching the pictures and the letters is a dramatic way to bring the stories alive.

### **Exercises**

#### **Character Observation**

If all you had was a photo of someone could you try to imagine what kind of person they were? Look at the picture and choose one person in the photo. First describe them physically using lots of adjectives, metaphors and similes. Then start to imagine what kind of personality they might have and write that description. This is a creative exercise so we don't have to worry about whether it's actually true; it's more about the impression the photo gives. You could then read out just the description of the personality and see if other people can guess who you are talking about.

#### **Talking Pictures (improvisation)**

Photos are silent. They are one split second in an entire life filled with words, sounds, and movement. In a group physically recreate the photo as precisely as you can with all the people played by students. Remember to be precise in the facial features, posture and position. Then imagine the photo that might have been taken one minute before this one and physically create that one. You now have two tableaux. This acts as the beginning and end of the improvisation. You might do a third, one minute after the real photo for instance, and then try to improvise through the tableaux. Now we get to hear the photo speak as the characters inside come alive.

#### **Transposition in the blink of an eye**

Photos can give a very strong impression very quickly. Try putting a photo face down in front of some students and tell them they will only get to see the photo for 10 seconds. Flip the photo over and show it for the allotted time and then put it away. Then ask the students to write down adjectives to describe what they saw. Using those adjectives they might try to draw a picture, make a poem or start a short story. Later you can compare the photo, the inspiration, and the resulting transposed piece of art and see what is similar and what is not.



## **Contact**

For more information about the play or to send feedback please contact us at the address below.

Rustwerk Refinery  
6 Romeo-Gendron  
Gatineau, Quebec J9H 2W1  
[attilaclemann@gmail.com](mailto:attilaclemann@gmail.com)

Educational Package designed by  
Attila Clemann

Harold Green Jewish Theatre Company  
121 Parkway Forest Drive, suite 107  
Toronto, Ontario  
M2J-5H4  
416-932-9995  
[david@hgjewishtheatre.com](mailto:david@hgjewishtheatre.com)